Book reopens J.F.K. case: Who did it?

By EDWARD L. KENNEY
Staff reporter

Robert Groden was playing hooky at home in Forest Hills, N.Y., the day John F. Kennedy was shot. He remembers the tragedy vividly. It was his 18th birthday.

Groden now lives in Boothwyn, Pa., and he'll observe his birthday the way he has each year since that sad day 26 years ago Wednesday — with mixed emotions. A big difference this year is that he's finally published "High Treason," a revealing book about the Kennedy assassination that was "12 years in the making."

The book, written with co-author Harrison Edward Livingstone of Baltimore, outlines dozens of reasons Groden believes there was likely more than one gunman in Dealey Plaza in Dallas that day. It has sold 15,000 copies since its first printing in April, despite the fact that it was published by Livingstone's own Conservatory Press and many stores won't stock independently published books.

After all this time, people still hunger for information about the assassination.

"For some, I think it's the greatest murder mystery of all time," said Groden, seated on a living room couch at home near a bust of Kennedy. "For me, it's anger at being lied to. We have a right to know what happened to Kennedy; we have a need to know. We lost someone very special that day, and it's something we haven't recovered from yet."

Groden's consuming drive to unravel the mystery actually started 23 years ago, when he was working as an industrial photographer in New York. In 1966 someone brought him a copy of the famous Zapruder assassination film, which Time-Life had bought for $250,000 but was keeping in a vault. "There was no way they were going to do anything with it," he said.

The Zapruder film was shot with a hand-held camera, and the image jumped all over the place. So the first thing Groden did was zoom in close, using Kennedy's head as a focal point, and reshot the film. The process is called rotoscoping. But, said Groden, it has come to be known by the "assassination underground" as Grodenscoping.

Groden also used a process called stretch framing to slow down the action. "I slowed it down so the mind can comprehend what it's seeing with much greater clarity. You could see the [president's] response much clearer than ever before. It's a clock for the assassination.

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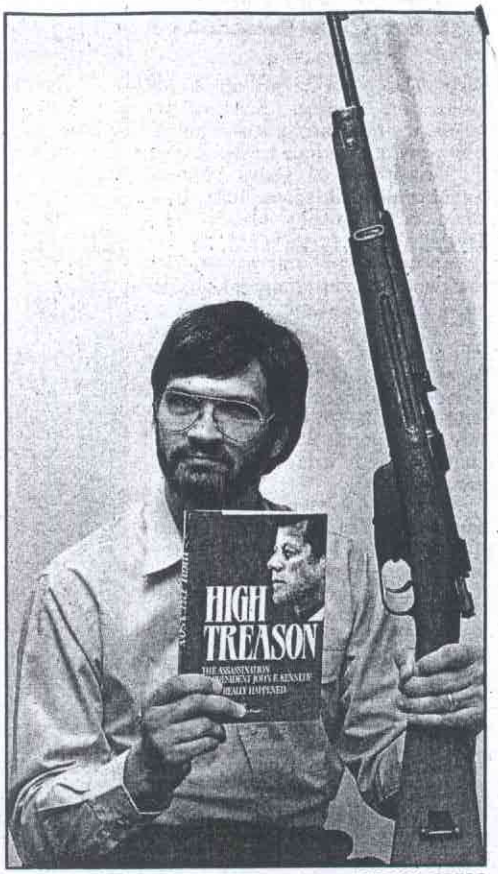

The News Journal/SUSAN L. GREGG

Robert Groden holds his book and a gun like the one presumably used in Kennedy's assassination.

To find the book

"High Treason" costs $21.95 for hardcover and $16.95 for softcover. It's available at Jeremiah's records on Philadelphia Pike, at West Coast Video in Boothwyn, Pa., or by calling (800) 627-3213.

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You can see when he was hit and how he responded to those shots."

There were many movie cameras at Dealey Plaza the day of the assassination, and they filmed the president's motorcade from every angle. The most famous of these are the Zapruder, Nix and Muchmore films. Groden enhanced each of them and was astonished by what he saw. Kennedy had been hit in the front of the head, which was thrown back violently from the impact.

There are more than 10 million words in the Warren Commission report, Groden said, but there's not one word of the president's head being thrown back.

Groden spent nine years "sitting on" the enhanced films, "too afraid to do anything with them." Then, in 1975, he appeared on ABC-TV's "Goodnight America" and screened the films for a national audience. As a result of the show, he was invited to Washington by a Virginia congressional delegation. Later Rep. Thomas Downing of Virginia introduced legislation to reopen the assassination investigation, which led to the creation of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. Groden was appointed the committee's staff photographic consultant.

Some of Groden's findings, as reported in "High Treason":

■ Autopsy pictures taken of Kennedy reveal a photographic crop line on the back of the president's head. Groden said the photos have been doctored to cover up the rear exit wound. When working on "High Treason," Livingstone visited Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, where more than two dozen doctors who operated on Kennedy or were involved in his autopsy insisted the photo was false.

■ Through studying film of the assassination, Groden discovered that the car in which Kennedy was riding didn't speed up after the shots were fired, but actually slowed down. Groden wonders if the driver was afraid he would drive into the line of fire if he sped up, perhaps knowing that someone was shooting from the front. Another reason he might have slowed down, Groden theorizes, is to make Kennedy an easier target.

■ The enhanced films show Jackie Kennedy crawling across the back of the limousine after the president was shot — not to help a Secret Service agent climb aboard, as was originally thought, but to retrieve a portion of skull from the president's head. Such a fragment would have been at the rear of the car only if the impact had been from the front.

The Select Committee disagreed with the Warren Commission by ruling there was more than one gunman; it disbanded in 1978. Groden continued to investigate.

He originally started writing a book about the Kennedy assassination on his own. But then he met Livingstone, who was working at the Baltimore Sun. Both were writing similar books about the assassination, and they decided to team up.

Four separate publishers, including Simon & Schuster, expressed interest in publishing "High Treason." But each wanted to excise 100 or more pages to make it less expensive to publish. The authors decided to put out the 469-page book themselves.

With the assassination anniversary this week, Groden expects to be busy with personal appearances and radio talk shows. "I'm scheduled to do over 60 shows. I'm doing a lot of them by telephone to various parts of the country. I have requests for appearances through next January."

Groden has more than enough illustrations for his lectures. His collection of assassination photographs, he said, is even larger than the one at the National Archives. "Some of it's here; some of it's in vaults or other places. I don't dare keep them all in one spot." Groden wants to get the photos onto video laser disc before they deteriorate.

Hearing of his photo-enhancement work, people continue to bring assassination pictures to him. He has one intriguing photo that he didn't discover in time to put in the book. It shows someone at a window — far from the so-called assassin's window — on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. Since the sixth floor was one big room, Lee Harvey Oswald would've had an audience if he had been there, Groden said.

"I don't think Oswald ever fired a shot. He was seen on the second floor of the building 72 seconds after the shooting. He was standing there calmly drinking a Coca-Cola. Whether he was involved in the assassination or had something to do with it, we may never know. But all the evidence says he never fired a shot."